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In Response

Social Work: Professional Opportunities for Behavior Analysts

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The field of behavior analysis is composed of two major areas, the experimental analysis of behavior, devoted to basic science endeavors, and applied behavior analysis, concerned with developing, testing, and disseminating behavioral solutions to problems of social and personal importance. Many behavior analysts with an educational and training background in the experimental analysis of behavior (EAB) develop an interest in applied behavior analysis and subsequently seek additional academic and clinical credentials in applied areas. Given the historical association of EAB with the field of psychology, many behavior analysts with an experimental background explore further training leading to licensure as a clinical or counseling psychologist. Unfortunately, such "retread" programs are relatively few in number and may require three or more years of further full-time postdoctoral education (American Psychological Association, 1966; Mahrer, 1987).

Otherwise well-trained doctoral and master's-level psychologists with a background in behavior analysis often find it difficult to engage in applied practice if they have not completed an approved program in clinical, counseling, or school psychology. One solution which has been proposed is to establish a separate discipline for behaviorists apart from psychology. Among the suggested labels for this new academic and professional discipline have been *praxics* (Epstein, 1984) and *behaviorology* (Fraley & Vargas, 1986). Responses to these proposals have been mixed: some defend the role of behavior analysts within the discipline of psychology (e.g., Harzem, 1987); others support more familiar terms such as the experimental analysis of behavior (e.g., Gaydos, 1986).

Although I am not taking sides here on the advisability of attempting to establish a separate discipline for behavior analysts, it is clear to me that such efforts would require a considerable time to come to fruition. In the interim I would like to suggest that the Master of Social Work (M.S.W.) degree is a universally accepted clinical credential which is a viable postdoctoral or postmaster's training option for the experimentally trained behavior analyst. Here are some facts about the M.S.W. in support of this contention.

Approximately 100 universities offer the M.S.W. degree and are accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 1984). The M.S.W. program consists of 2 academic years of training that may be completed in many schools in 1½ calendar years. Required coursework includes "Human Behavior in the Social Environment," "Social Work Practice," "Research," "Social Welfare Policy and Services," and an internship of not less than 900 clock hours, integrated into the 2-year curriculum (CSWE, 1982). Coursework on behavior analysis and therapy, and single-subject research designs, is an accepted component of a number of existing M.S.W. training programs (Thyer & Maddox, 1988), and a behavioral perspective is an important

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and thriving "school of practice" within social work (Thyer, 1987a; Thyer, 1988; Thyer & Bronson, 1981). Over 60 textbooks and hundreds of journal articles describing behavior analysis and therapy exist within the social work literature (Thyer, 1981, 1985) and the experimentally trained behavior analyst enrolled in a school of social work will receive a hearing at least as sympathetic as that available in most clinical and counseling psychology training programs. Interestingly, a major factor which has historically distinguished social workers from other health care providers has been a focus upon "the transactions between people and their environments that affect their ability to accomplish life tasks, alleviate distress, and realize individual and collective aspirations" (CSWE, 1982, p. 6). Such a perspective is virtually identical with the concerns of the applied behavior analyst.

As a clinical credential, the M.S.W. has a number of strengths. Social workers are the largest group of mental health professionals in the United States. The membership of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, the social work equivalent to the APA) is over 120,000 and exceeds the combined ranks of the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association. The practice of clinical social work is licensed or otherwise legally regulated in over 40 states and territories (Curtis, 1986), and universal licensure seems likely in the near future if recent legislative trends continue. Third-party vendorship privileges are being extended to clinical social workers by many federal, state, and private insurance programs, which facilitates earning a living through private practice (Curtis, 1986). Licensure as a clinical social worker is available in most states to graduates from an accredited M.S.W. program who have completed a clinical specialization, obtained 2 years of supervised postmaster's practice experience, and passed a comprehensive written licensure examination (Thyer & Biggerstaff, in press). Licensure is not usually a requirement for supervised agency-based practice.

In many areas of so-called mental health care, social workers play an important role, including the practice of individual therapy, marital and family counseling, group treatment, organizational consultation, and community practice (Staff, 1985). In addition, social workers are extensively involved in services to racial minorities and women, people with chronic mental illnesses and other severe behavior disorders, the homeless, abused or neglected children, and the aged. Each of these areas is an existing or potential domain of applied behavior analysis, and the public and private practice opportunities for the behavior analyst with clinical social work credentials are virtually limitless (West, Gaffney, Allen, & Barboza, 1988).

An unfortunate fact is that academic positions for both experimental and applied behavior analysts remain relatively few in number, as a perusal of any recent issue of the *APA Monitor* will confirm. The field of social work academics is much more promising! My last two social work doctoral students (who, it should be noted, conducted dissertation studies subsequently published in the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*) obtained positions as assistant professors in schools of social work prior to their graduation, at salaries of $30,000 for nine months. Almost all published advertisements for social work academic positions require the applicant to possess an M.S.W. and a Ph.D. in social work *or a related discipline.* My own school is probably typical: of 19 faculty with an M.S.W. and a doctorate, only nine possess doctorates in social work, the remaining doctorates being in psychology, education, marriage and family therapy, political science, etc. The experimentally trained behavior analyst with a Ph.D. in psychology, special education, education, and so on, and a subsequently earned M.S.W. would be a highly competitive academic job candidate, particularly if he or she had authored a few refereed publications at the time of the job interview.

Social workers have made significant contributions to the discipline of behavior analysis (Thyer, 1983), and both EAB

and ABA have much to offer the practice of social work (Thyer, 1987b). Having the experimentally trained behavior analyst earn an M.S.W. as a clinical credential will greatly enrich the practices of both disciplines.

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